



Hearing before the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Biennium Budget in reference  
to the Department of Social Services

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Suzette Strickland and I am a Food Stamp Outreach and Policy Manager at End Hunger Connecticut!. I am here today to briefly talk to you about the expansion of categorical eligibility for SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formally know as the food stamp program), which is outlined in the Governor's Budget. This is an option that the state may take, as long as the person applying has been touched by a TANF funded program, and has been very successful in our neighboring New England states.

This provision will increase the gross income guideline to 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, which is currently at 130%. Basically, this means that a family of four earning \$39,220 will be eligible. As it stand now, a family of four can only earn \$27,560 to receive SNAP benefits. This provision would also eliminate the asset test completely – currently an elderly or disabled person can have no more that \$3,000 in assets to qualify and all other can have no more than \$2,000 (this does not include motor vehicles, burial plots, or a home).

The extra benefits that will come into the state are 100 percent paid for from the federal government – and as part of the Economic Stimulus Package the President signed yesterday Connecticut will receive over a million dollars for administration of SNAP, as well as additional benefits.

We are assisting a huge number of people in our office with food stamps daily. Not only are we seeing low-income families, but now a huge number of middle class families are seeking temporary assistance such as food stamps – many of whom are not eligible because they fall just over the income guidelines.

Just yesterday I assisted two individuals who were interested in applying for food stamps. The first client was receiving \$1,281.00 in unemployment monthly. With the current income limit for a household of one being \$1,127.00 he was deemed over income. A woman with 1 child worked full-time, her gross earnings for the month were \$1714.00, with a mortgage payment of \$900.00 a month. The guideline for a household of 2 is currently \$1517.00, making her over income as well.

We applaud the Governor's taking this federal option – but we ask that it be implemented as soon as possible. If the expansion of categorical eligibility is instituted it would increase the number of families that would be eligible. The food stamp program was designed to help families in their time of need that time is now.